Citizens’ Perceptions of Politics and Ethics in Public Administration: A Five-Year National Study of Their Relationship to Satisfaction with Services, Trust in Governance, and Voice Orientations

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades organizational politics (OP) has become a growing field of interest in managerial studies. To date, the major scholarly effort has been dedicated to the exploration of intraorganizational politics based on employees’ perceptions. However, one of the important aspects of this phenomenon is the way in which it is viewed by the external organizational environment—by customers, clients, and as far as governmental agencies are concerned, by the general public as well. This article examines citizens’ perceptions of organizational politics and ethics in public administration systems. It focuses on the relationship between these perceptions and several key outcomes of modern bureaucracy such as satisfaction with services, trust in governmental institutions, and the resulting voice orientations and actions by the public (i.e., political efficacy, political participation). The data for the study were gathered from a half decade’s worth of national surveys in Israel. The results point to meaningful direct and indirect relationships between organizational politics and ethics in the public sector, satisfaction, trust, and voice orientation. The article ends with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the findings and suggestions for future studies.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades organizational politics (OP), and especially the way it is perceived by employees and managers, has become a field of great interest in business administration, management, and applied psychology. Studies have suggested that the ways employees perceive their workplace in terms of political climate, power struggles, influence tactics, and ethical decisions are meaningful in many respects. For example, organizations that are perceived as more political in nature are also considered less fair and less ethical (Ferris and Kacmar 1992; Kacmar and Ferris 1991). Furthermore, higher levels of organizational
politics often indicate the presence of injustice and the inequitable distribution of resources among employees and even among external clients of the organization (Thompson and Ingraham 1996). Such an environment and atmosphere may also result in diminished employee performance, higher levels of stress and strain (Harris and Kacmar 2005; Vigoda 2002), lower levels of job satisfaction, reduced commitment to the organization, and additional negative reactions by employees such as the delivery of low-quality services, increased turnover intentions, and higher rates of actual turnover (Ferris et al. 1996; Folger, Konovsky, and Cropanzano 1992; Vigoda-Gadot 2003).

Nonetheless, the perception of organizational politics has been studied thus far from only one perspective—the intraorganizational one. As far as we could find, to date no study has discussed this concept from an extraorganizational perspective and from the point of view of other stakeholders such as the clients, the customers, or the citizens. This fact is strongly supported in a recent review of developments in organizational politics (Vigoda-Gadot 2003). Whereas employees and managers are an important source of knowledge about internal politics and power games inside the workplace, other stakeholders in the organization may also have their valuable, independent perceptions of politics in administrative systems. Moreover, when public organizations are considered, such perceptions and understanding of the political climate may shed light on a wider range of consequences, such as citizens’ attitudes toward government, trust and faith in public sector agencies and their behavioral intentions, as well as actual behaviors in the democratic realm.

Hence, the prime goal of this article is to suggest a study of organizational politics and ethics in the public sector, this time from the point of view of citizens as clients or customers of the bureaucratic machinery. The article hopes to make a cross-disciplinary contribution by applying the considerable knowledge gained in organizational behavior theory to the study of public administration and political science. More specifically, the article attempts to make a linkage between citizens’ perceptions of internal politics in public organizations and other perceptions and behaviors of citizens toward government (i.e., satisfaction with services, trust in governance, political efficacy, and political participation). The second goal is therefore to suggest a theoretical model that portrays these relationships more specifically. After establishing the rationale for the model, it will be tested empirically using data collected from a half decade’s worth of national surveys.

ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS: ITS DEFINITION AND RELATIONSHIP WITH FAIRNESS AND ETHICS

The term “organizational politics” has its roots in both political science theory that promoted research into individuals’ political behavior (e.g., Almond and Verba 1965; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) and in conventional management studies that recognized the importance of the informal power game in the workplace (e.g., Mintzberg 1983; Pfeffer 1992). Studies emphasized that it is essential to know more about the covert side of individuals’ interest-promotion dynamics in various arenas, which is frequently the essence of any political behavior (Peterson 1990). As far as management theory is concerned, it became evident that gauging the political climate of a work unit is a complex task, but it is crucial for a better understanding of organizations, their effectiveness, efficiency, and general performance (Gandz and Murray 1980).

Studies have usually defined organizational politics as behavior strategically designed to maximize self-interests (Ferris, Russ, and Fandt 1989) and, by implication, in conflict
with the collective organizational goals or the interests of other individuals. Block (1988, 5) mentioned politics (in organizations) as basically a negative process and argued that, “If I told you you were a very political person, you would take it either as an insult or at best as a mixed blessing.” Gandz and Murray (1980) and Madison et al. (1980) observed that when individuals were asked to describe workplace politics they typically listed self-serving and manipulative activities that are not perceived positively. A series of studies by Kipnis and his colleagues, as well as others (Erez and Rim 1982; Kipnis and Schmidt 1982, 1983, 1988; Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson 1980), promoted the behavioral understanding of organizational politics by typologizing and analyzing the concept of influence tactics. These studies argued that organizational politics was perceived as self-serving behavior by employees to achieve self-interests, advantages, and benefits at the expense of others, sometimes contrary to the interests of the entire organization or work unit. This behavior was frequently associated with manipulation, defamation, subversiveness, and illegitimate ways of using power to attain one’s objectives. Therefore, organizational politics was labeled as unethical and even immoral or corrupt behavior.

Faced with the difficulty of measuring organizational politics empirically, Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) suggested the concept of the “perception” of organizational politics as a useful gauge of this phenomenon. Kacmar and Ferris (1991, 193–94) and Ferris and Kacmar (1992, 93) promoted a cognitive approach and argued that the stronger the perception of politics by organizational members, the less likely they were to believe the organization to be just, equitable, or fair. More recent studies (Ferris et al. 1996; Harris and Kacmar 2005; Vigoda-Gadot 2003) have used the theory of procedural justice to argue that organizational politics is related to the efficiency of human resource systems and to decision-making processes. Lack of minimal justice and fairness in these systems was found to be a leading cause of higher perceptions of organizational politics and therefore of impaired organizational outcomes. All these studies draw on the classic work by Kurt Lewin (1936), who argued that people respond to their perceptions of reality, not to reality itself. Likewise, politics in organizations should be understood in terms of what people think of it rather than what it actually represents.

This cognitive approach has also guided the current study, but in a different way. Whereas all of the studies mentioned above, as well as others, have used an intraorganizational assessment approach to the study of organizational politics, this article points to the advantages of an extraorganizational perspective. According to this line of thinking, other stakeholders also have important perceptions about internal organizational politics, and these perceptions must be considered when organizational outcomes and performances are assessed. This view is much in line with Kurt Lewin’s approach of studying organizations through the eyes of “significant others,” which in this case are the citizens who are the customers of public organizations and public agencies. Moreover, this view is also rooted in social climate theories such as the ones suggested by Mintzberg (1983) or Drory (1993). According to this view, the events comprising organizational politics naturally occur within the social arena of the organization. This social arena may be internal but also external to the organization. Consequently, perceptions of fairness and ethics stemming from internal politics will be primarily reflected in one’s attitudes to elements one considers responsible for the political climate. These may be supervisors, employees, or, when public organizations are concerned, public servants. All the studies mentioned thus far also treated organizational politics and fairness/ethics independently, although they did point out their strong intercorrelations. Kacmar and Ferris (1991) and Ferris and Kacmar (1992)
argued that the higher the perceptions of politics are in the eyes of an organization member, the lower in that person’s eyes is the level of justice, equity, and fairness. Other studies (e.g., Ferris et al. 1996) have argued that OP is related to the efficiency of human resource systems and to decision-making processes. Lack of minimal justice and fairness in these systems was found to be a leading cause of higher perceptions of organizational politics and therefore of poorer organizational outcomes. In line with these studies, it is suggested that a political organizational climate may contribute to the perpetuation of unfair and unjust activities and decisions. The inequity of these decisions may be clearly evident to many stakeholders, such as employees, managers, clients, or citizens. When a client or a citizen feels unfairly treated because of political considerations or the self-serving interests of the public official, he/she will be inclined to react initially by reducing his/her level of satisfaction with or trust in governance, by reducing his/her loyalty to the governmental and administrative system, or by withholding voluntary activities and downgrading his/her attachment to the democratic system. This process may further result in lower levels of political efficacy or political participation (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991).

ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS AND ETHICS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: A CITIZENS’ PERSPECTIVE

Internal politics, power relations, influence tactics, and ethics are inherent to the discussion of modern public administration. Thompson and Ingraham (1996, 292) have defined organizational politics as the art of competition among individuals while striving for divergent objectives. They suggest that a political analysis of organizations contrasts with rational models that portray organizations as directed toward the achievement of a single set of mutually agreed upon goals. The frequently political and unfair nature of public administration systems can be demonstrated in several ways. For example, by their very nature, public organizations are intimately tied to political and governmental systems. Thus, studies have suggested a spillover effect of political skills, attitudes, and behaviors from one arena to another (Peterson 1990; Sobel 1993). A recent study by Vigoda-Gadot and Kapun (2005) examined the perceptions of politics among 336 public sector employees and 364 private sector employees. The study confirmed that public organizations are perceived as much more political in nature than private organizations. A possible explanation for this phenomenon offered by the study was based on the spillover theory.

In addition, many are familiar with the problematic question of political nominations in public administration, the complexity of requirement systems that should be professional but frequently face external political pressures, the limited internal reward system, the slow promotion processes that are often not commensurate with the actual effort of the employees, the resulting poor motivation or performance of public servants, and the inflexibility of such bureaucratic systems. In this context, Thompson and Ingraham (1996) investigated the reinvention labs that have been established in federal agencies and the organizational politics that accompany these attempts at innovation and organizational change. Their findings emphasize the role of organizational politics and the self-interested behavior of individuals in determining the outcomes of organizational change. They conclude by confirming “the value of political models for understanding organizational change processes” in public administration (Thompson and Ingraham 1996, 291). Consequently, public administration and the government are frequently criticized for their high level of internal politics that detracts from professional decision making. It is argued that
such processes and conflicts negatively affect fairness and equity in resource allocation to different populations. Federal and national agencies are occasionally accused by the public of unfair treatment and immoral behavior, accusations that stem from internal conflicts among players and from political considerations that are nonprofessional and irrelevant to the issues at hand.

Furthermore, organizational politics in public administration may arise from other reasons. At times, tense relations between the politically appointed rank and file and the professional ranks of the public servants develop (Nalbandian 1980). These tense relations potentially increase the degree of citizens’ suspicions of and doubts about many kinds of bureaucratic decisions and actions (Stivers 2001). In this context, Gawthrop (1998) is concerned with the prevailing vacuity of public sector ethics and the moral disconnect between democracy and bureaucracy (Ruhil 2000). Gawthrop further explains that a democratic “value vision” (that is, one that is based on citizens’ trust, loyalty, benevolence, unselfishness, prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice, faith, hope, and even love) must be enhanced in order to promote the common good. Thus, the improvement of organizational performance and the success of public sector reforms and bureaucratic management are highly dependent on democratic values and on mutual trust between institutions and ordinary citizens. As perceptions of organizational politics and ethics represent many of these shared values toward bureaucracy, they should be studied extensively in the public sector to improve both managerialism and democratic values. In line with these ideas, it is clear why citizens’ perceptions of politics and ethics in the public sector are crucial for a better understanding of the dynamics and outcomes of the public sector machinery.

Hence, it may be argued that ordinary citizens are acutely aware of organizational politics through various means such as the media, personal contacts with others, or their own experience with public agencies. It is not surprising, therefore, that opinions voiced through the media and public debates identify internal politics with injustice and with unethical actions in public administration. Such actions are considered key obstacles to building a quality managerial climate that well serves the people. In support with this view, Kelly (1998) deals with the interrelations between New Public Management (NPM) reforms and the democratic polity. She suggests that “a particular public bureaucracy or administrative structure is embedded within a particular socioeconomic system” (Kelly 1998, 201) and that, in the final analysis, politics and administration cannot be separated. In her view, “there are value trade-offs and politics involved in almost all administrative decisions, and in many delivery contexts” (Kelly 1998, 205). However, the proximity between bureaucracy and democracy, or between administration and politics, may also result in higher levels of organizational politics that may be easily observed by citizens and translate into attitudes and actions in the democratic realm.

**ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS, ETHICS, CITIZENS’ SATISFACTION, TRUST, AND VOICE ORIENTATIONS: A MODEL**

In the previous sections we explained the logic behind the belief that the public’s perceptions about the politics and ethics of the public sector will help us better understand these phenomena and their aftermaths. Based on this rationale, we have developed a research model to test a series of specific relationships. The theoretical model is presented in figure 1. Basically, it argues that citizens’ perceptions of organizational politics and ethics in the
public sector are important antecedents of several bureaucratic and democratic outcomes (Kelly 1998; Thompson and Ingraham 1996). These outcomes include both perceptual and behavioral dimensions. Trust in government and in public administration represents a perceptual dimension, whereas political efficacy and political participation are more active features of voice orientations. Among these, scholars distinguish between political participation, which is an actual behavior, and political efficacy, which reflects a belief about the effectiveness of active involvement (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

The model utilizes both direct and indirect relationships. First, a direct relationship is suggested between the independent variables and satisfaction with services. According to this line of thinking, citizens who believe that higher levels of internal politics, as well as lower levels of ethics and morality, exist in public administration will also demonstrate lower levels of satisfaction with the services they receive. This belief is based on studies in management and organization theory that have found a significant relationship between employees’ feelings about internal politics and ethics in the workplace and their satisfaction with their jobs (Ferris and Kacmar 1992; Kacmar et al. 1999; Witt, Andrews, and Kacmar 2000). In addition, studies in public administration have suggested that public perceptions about the ethics and fairness of public officers and of public agencies are positively related to the public’s level of satisfaction with services received from them (DeLeon 1996; Vigoda 2000; Wilenski 1980).

We further suggest that organizational politics and ethics, together with satisfaction with services, are good predictors of attitudes toward the democratic system. This relationship is based on the idea that ethical considerations become highly significant in determining citizens’ views of governments and administration (Esman 1997; Goldoff 1996; Webler and Tuler 2000; Willbern 1984). Support for this relationship is also rooted in the model used for assessing the American Customer Satisfaction Index that directly relates citizens’ satisfaction with trust in governance (Van Ryzin et al. 2004). Thus, when citizens perceive the bureaucracy as insensitive, feel that it promotes the interests of powerful individuals or groups based on political considerations, and believe that it engages in unfair practices, public attitudes toward democracy may become more cynical. Similarly, citizens may react negatively, either cognitively and/or behaviorally, by reducing their levels of trust and confidence in governance. More actively, these perceptions may lead to
diminished belief in the value of citizens’ involvement or political efficacy, negatively affecting citizens’ willingness to participate in politics and discouraging them from becoming more involved in communal activities (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Consequently, the first variable to be tested in this context is trust in governance. Our argument for this relationship is based on studies that have demonstrated a positive relationship between trust in government and the public’s satisfaction with the services they receive from the government (Van de Walle and Bouckaert 2003; Van Ryzin et al. 2004; Vigoda-Gadot and Yuval 2003; Welch 2005). Studies have also suggested that trust and satisfaction are affected by peoples’ perceptions of the level of ethics, morality, and the proper handling of decision-making processes in public administration (e.g., Berman and West 1994; Gawthorp 1998). Thus, we suggest that perceptions of organizational politics and unethical behavior in public administration have a negative relationship with citizens’ satisfaction with services and with trust in governance.

Accordingly, the model posits perceptions of politics and ethics as direct antecedents of several democratic values and behaviors. The argument here is based on the works of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) and Gawthorp (1998), who have argued that fairness, equity, and justice are core values in bureaucracy that have an immense effect on citizens’ acceptance of the democratic ethos and thus also affect passive and active responses toward politics and towards government. Thus, higher levels of organizational politics, immorality, and unethical actions in the public sector may also lead to lower levels of political efficacy and political participation among citizens.

Finally, the model also suggests that the relationship between voice orientations and the independent variables (organizational politics and ethics) is mediated by satisfaction with services and by trust in governance. Whereas conventional wisdom may suggest that citizens directly translate their views about ethics and political dynamics in the public sector into behavior intentions or actual behaviors (i.e., voice orientations), the model takes a more cautious approach by also suggesting an indirect relationship. As studies in political behavior have shown (e.g., Brady 1999; Milbrath and Goel 1977; Peterson 1990; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), political efficacy and political participation are phenomena with multiple predictors. Therefore, we argue that citizens who view public services as political in nature, unfair, and unethical may first react by expressing lower levels of satisfaction and trust, and only then, with time and experience, translate their dissatisfaction with governance into more tangible reactions toward government and the political system. One passive reaction may be a lower level of political efficacy or trust in civic behavior. Another, more active reaction may be a reduced willingness to become involved in political processes and reduced levels of political participation. This view is strongly rooted in the cognitive approach to human behavior suggested by Lewin (1936) and is opposed to the behaviorist approach (e.g., Erez and Rim 1982; Kipnis, Schmidt, and Wilkinson 1980). In keeping with the cognitive approach, we argue that citizens’ beliefs and perceptions will be translated into voice orientations and participation through a slower process of “mind change” and transformation of faith over time. Thus, perceiving the public sector as rife with internal politics and unethical decisions will likely result in voice orientations of change only after dissatisfaction with services is expressed and mistrust in governance is demonstrated (Van Ryzin et al. 2004). In line with this, we suggest that citizens’ satisfaction with services and trust in governance mediate the relationship between organizational politics and ethics on one hand and political efficacy and political participation on the other.
THE FIVE-YEAR NATIONAL SURVEY

Sample and Procedure

The model was examined with data gathered in Israel over five consecutive years, from 2001 until 2005. The data were collected using questionnaires distributed to citizens nationwide. The questionnaire was designed to examine the relationships among perceptions of politics, ethics, satisfaction with services, trust in governance, and two voice orientations: political efficacy and political participation. All together 2,281 individuals participated in the study—345 in 2001, 502 in 2002, 490 in 2003, 446 in 2004, and 498 in 2005 (average response rate was around 86 percent). Citizens were asked to provide their perceptions and attitudes toward public administration, public services, and public officials on the national and local levels. Data were collected between May and July of each year by a random sampling method. We sampled various cities and other settlements based on geographic location, size, and structure of population. All large, medium, and small cities, as well as more rural towns across the nation, were represented. Interviewers met the participants in various locations such as public venues, governmental institutions, and private homes. Anonymity was assured, and participants were encouraged to complete the questionnaires on the spot in order to increase the return rate. Average time for completing the questionnaire was fifteen to twenty minutes. However, interviewers were instructed to be more flexible with those respondents who asked for more time to complete their questionnaire. In such cases, interviewers returned to the potential participants and collected the questionnaires in person. Alternatively, the respondents could mail or e-mail their complete questionnaires directly to the researchers.

Of the total sample, 51 percent were men and 49 percent women, 50 percent were married, and 17.2 percent were new immigrants (ten years or less in Israel). Average age was 34.1 years (S.D. = 12.2) and average years of education was 10.1 (S.D. = 5.6). With regard to socioeconomic level, 81 percent were Jews, and a breakdown by income showed that 40.8 percent had a low monthly net income (up to $900), 38.5 percent had an average income ($901–1,600), and 20.7 percent had a high income (above $1,600). Note that the research sample was highly representative of the overall Israeli population. The demographic characteristics of the sample were quite similar to those of the total population in Israel as reported in the Statistical Yearbook for each of the tested years. For example, in 2004, 50 percent of the Israeli population was male, 53 percent of adults were married, the average age was about 36 years, the median number of years of education was 12.5, 80 percent of the population was Jewish, and the average net monthly income was about $1,250.

Measures

Organizational Politics (OP). Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989) defined organizational politics from the perspective of the employee. According to their view, this variable represents the degree to which respondents view their work environment as political and therefore unjust and unfair. Based on this view and on other studies that followed (Kacmar and Carlson 1994; Kacmar and Ferris 1991; Vigoda-Gadot 2003), we took a different approach that focused on citizens’ perspectives of this phenomenon that reflected the level of political considerations in administrative work and decision making. A three-item scale, using the following statements, was used to test this variable: (1) “The actions of the public
administration serve the purposes of only a few individuals, not the public system or the public interest”; (2) “ Favoritism rather than professionalism determines the decisions made in public administration”; and (3) “Generally speaking, the public administration operates appropriately and is not affected by political pressures” (reversed score). Respondents were asked to assess the public sector in general and report the degree to which they agreed with the items on a scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). A higher score meant a higher perception of organizational politics. With the exception of the year 2002 where the reliability was somehow low (.55), the reliability of the other years ranged between .61 and .79, with an overall value of .66 for the whole period.

Ethics (ET). This variable was defined as the level of ethics and integrity of public personnel and was measured by a three-item scale: (1) “In Israeli public administration, most civil servants are impartial and honest”; (2) “Citizens of this country receive equal and fair treatment from public officials”; and (3) “In Israeli public administration, deviations from good moral norms are rare.” Reliability of this scale ranged between .65 and .76, with an overall value of .72 for the whole period.

Satisfaction with Services (SWS). This variable encompassed detailed information regarding citizens’ satisfaction with various public services on the national and communal level. Respondents were given a list of public institutions and organizations that deliver various services. They were asked to report how satisfied they were with the treatment they received either when they came personally to the public offices or contacted them by phone. The services that were studied were (1) hospitals and public clinics, (2) public schools, (3) courts, (4) the Ministry of the Interior, (5) the Labor Ministry and employment services, (6) police, (7) the Transportation Ministry, (8) public transport/buses, (9) public transport/rails, (10) public transport/El Al, Israel’s national airline, (11) public transport/airport authority, (12) public postal system, (13) local municipality, (14) electricity company, (15) the Ministry of Religious Affairs, (16) welfare system and national security, (17) telecommunication services, and (18) tax system. Respondents were asked to report the degree to which they agreed with the items. The response scale ranged from one (strongly disagree/very dissatisfied) to five (strongly agree/very satisfied). Reliability of this scale ranged between .81 and .90, with an overall value of .84 for the whole period.

Trust in Governance (TRS). Trust in government and in public administration refers to the level of faith or confidence citizens have in state authorities and in administrative branches of various kinds (Citrin and Muste 1999). It was measured using an eighteen-item scale. Respondents were provided with a list of various state agencies and public organizations (e.g., Ministry of Health, public hospitals, judiciary system, police and prisons, public broadcasting system, Ministry of Transportation, state comptroller’s office, and the central bank). They were asked to indicate how much trust they had in each of them on a five-point scale from one (very low trust) to five (very high trust). Reliability of this scale ranged between .85 and .89, with an overall value of .88 for the whole period.

Political Efficacy (PE). This variable was defined as one’s potential influence on the political and governmental system (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) and was measured with a four-item scale: (1) “The average person has a great deal of influence on government and administrative decisions”; (2) “The public has a great deal of control over what public servants do in the office”; (3) “The average person can make a difference by talking to public officials”; and (4) “The average person has a strong say in the running of the local government.” Reliability of this scale ranged between .74 and .80, with an overall value of .77 for the whole period.
Political Participation (PP). This variable refers to “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they make” (Verba and Nie 1972, 2) or actions through which ordinary members of a political system influence or attempt to influence outcomes (Nagel 1987). An eight-item scale was used, based on similar measures developed elsewhere (Almond and Verba 1965; Brady 1999; Milbrath and Goel 1977; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Respondents were asked to report the frequency of their involvement in these political activities: being a member of a political party; keeping informed about politics; voting regularly in general elections; sending support/protest letters to politicians or to different newspapers; being an active member of a public organization (public committee, political party, etc.); taking part in demonstrations or political meetings; engaging in political discussions; being a candidate for public office; signing petitions on political issues. Respondents were asked to indicate on a three-level scale how active they were in each activity: (1) never active, (2) active in the past, (3) active today. The total score for each respondent was calculated by summing the responses for each item. Reliability of this scale ranged between .69 and .74, with an overall value of .72 for the whole period.

Data Analysis and the Test of Mediation

To support the relationships as suggested in the model we employed four strategies. First, we analyzed internal correlations to examine the relationships among the research variables. Second, we conducted a standard multiple regression analysis to test for the direct effect of the independent variables on satisfaction, trust, and voice orientations. In the regression analyses, we also controlled for several demographic variables such as age, education, and gender that have been found to be relevant in studies on political efficacy and political participation (e.g., Peterson 1990; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), as well as in studies on organizational politics (e.g., Ferris and Kacmar 1992; Vigoda-Gadot 2003). Furthermore, we used a multiple hierarchical regression analysis to test the mediating effect of SWS and TRS. Finally, even though there are other effective ways to test a model such as ours (i.e., Structural Equation Modeling or Path Analysis), we conducted the test of mediation following the studies of Baron and Kenny (1986), Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998), and Kenny’s Web page on mediation.1 Thus, the last stage of the hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine the effect of the independent variables on voice orientations, controlling for the mediating variables. According to these sources, to test for mediation one should calculate the following three regression equations. First, the dependent variable is regressed on the independent variable, whereby the independent variable must affect the dependent variable to establish that there is an effect that may be mediated. Second, the mediator is regressed on the independent variable, whereby the independent variable must affect the mediator. Third, the dependent variable is regressed on both the independent variable and the mediator, whereby the mediator must affect the dependent variable while controlling for the independent variable. If these conditions all hold in the predicted direction, a certain level of mediation exists. An additional fourth condition concerns the case of full mediation. Here the effect of the independent variable on the outcome variable controlling for the mediator should be zero. If this effect is

1 See http://davidakenny.net/cm/mediate.htm (accessed 17 May 2006).
anything other than zero (i.e., if only the first three equations hold), a partial mediation is indicated.

**FINDINGS**

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and psychometric properties for the model’s variables for the five years. In addition, figure 2 provides a graph that illustrates the change in the core variables over time. According to table 1, all of the variables’ characteristics, including means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s alphas were reasonable. In addition, table 2 presents a correlation matrix among the research variables for the combined sample (2001–2005). As can be seen, most of the intercorrelations hold in the expected directions, and none of them exceeds the maximum level of .70, which is a good indication for the absence of multicollinearity among the variables. OP and ET correlated at the $r = .31$, $p < .001$ level. Additional factor analysis (principal components with varimax rotation) that was conducted for these two variables yielded two clear-cut factors for each of the variables, which again indicates that they are distinctive but related to each other. These zero-order correlations suggest that citizens’ perceptions of organizational politics are negatively related with satisfaction with services (SWS), trust in governance (TRS), and political efficacy (PE) ($r = -.19$, $p < .001$; $r = -.22$, $p < .001$; and $r = -.30$, $p < .001$, respectively). The results for perceptions of ethics (ET) are even stronger. ET is positively related with SWS, TRS, PE, and PP ($r = .35$, $p < .001$; $r = .39$, $p < .001$; $r = .46$, $p < .001$; and $r = .11$, $p < .001$, respectively). In addition, SWS is positively related with TRS and with PE ($r = .67$, $p < .001$ and $r = .31$, $p < .001$, respectively). TRS was further positively related with PE ($r = .40$, $p < .001$), and finally, PP was positively related with PE ($r = .08$, $p < .01$), even if quite modestly. These findings provide initial support for the direct relationship between the dependent and the independent variables. However, these relationships still need to be tested with multivariate analysis to examine their stability.

Table 3 presents the results of four multiple regression analyses where satisfaction with services (SWS), trust in governance (TRS), political efficacy (PE), and political participation (PP) were separately regressed on the independent and control variables for the combined sample. According to table 3, perceived organizational politics (OP) showed a modest negative relationship with SWS and TRS ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = -.06$, $p < .001$, respectively). Again, the results for ET were even more impressive. ET had a consistent positive relationship with SWS ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) and a somewhat weaker but still positive, noteworthy relationship with TRS ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$). Moreover,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organizational Politics (OP)</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ethics (ET)</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Satisfaction with Services (SWS)</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trust in Governance (TRS)</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Political Efficacy (PE)</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Political Participation (PP)</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 2,281$.

$^a$Scale ranged from 1–3.
as the model suggests, SWS was examined as another antecedent to TRS. As expected, the relationship was positive and high ($\beta = .60, p < .001$). All in all, these findings support the direct relationships as suggested previously. In addition, in accordance with the conditions for mediation specified by Baron and Kenny (1986), Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998), and Kenny’s Web page, the suspected mediating variables (SWS and TRS) were positively related with the independent variables OP and ET. Thus, we further concluded that the first condition for mediation holds for the variables SWS and TRS. Our further analyses will therefore continue to examine a mediation effect for these variables.

Table 3 also demonstrates some of the relationships between the independent variables and voice orientations (PE and PP). As can be seen, political efficacy (PE) and political participation (PP) were separately regressed on OP, ET, and the control variables. A direct positive relationship was found mainly between ET and voice orientations ($\beta = .40, p < .001$ for PE and $\beta = .10, p < .001$ for PP). OP was negatively related with PE ($\beta = -.18, p < .001$) but not with PP.

To examine the indirect relationships and the mediating effect of SWS and TRS, we followed Baron and Kenny (1986) and applied a hierarchical regression analysis. This analysis is presented in table 4. This table will allow us to test both of the direct relationships as suggested previously, but this time with respect to added explained variance ($\Delta R^2$). It will also allow us to examine the additional two conditions for mediation. PE and PP were regressed on the independent variables using a three-step model. First, the dependent variable (PE and PP) was regressed on the control variables (step 1). Second, SWS and TRS were added to the equations (step 2), and finally OP and ET were added (step 3) to examine the independent contribution of each of these variables to the overall explained variance of the dependent variables.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean (S.D.)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organizational Politics (OP)</td>
<td>3.67 (.80)</td>
<td>2263</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ethics (ET)</td>
<td>2.54 (.90)</td>
<td>2246</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Satisfaction with Services (SWS)</td>
<td>3.04 (.55)</td>
<td>2279</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trust in Governance (TRS)</td>
<td>2.92 (.59)</td>
<td>2279</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Political Efficacy (PE)</td>
<td>2.19 (.79)</td>
<td>2245</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Political Participation (PP)*</td>
<td>1.82 (.41)</td>
<td>1429</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11**</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Gender (1 = women)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2255</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.10**</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.10**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Education</td>
<td>10.07 (5.61)</td>
<td>2209</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.07**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Age</td>
<td>34.12 (12.21)</td>
<td>2204</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>-.09**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 2,281.
*aScale ranged from 1 to 3.
*p < .01; **p < .001.
In the first step of the equations, the control variables had no significant relationship with the dependent variables. However, the second and third steps of the regressions provided very interesting findings. As can be seen from the results of the combined sample, SWS was positively related with PE in the second step of the regression (β = .09, p < .001) and with PP in the third step of the regression (β = .08, p < .05). TRS was much more strongly related with PE in the second step (β = .35, p < .001) and in the third step (β = .23, p < .001). However, its relationship with PP was significant only in the second step of the regression (β = .07, p < .05) but not in the third step, which indicates a lack of stability for this relationship. The inclusion of SWS and TRS in step 2 contributed 17 percent of the explained variance in PE but made no contribution to the explained variance of PP.

Step 3 of the equations added the variables OP and ET. As can be seen, both OP and ET demonstrated a significant relationship with PE (β = -.15, p < .001 and β = .31, p < .001, respectively). In addition, ET demonstrated a positive relationship with PP (β = .11, p < .001). The inclusion of OP and ET in step 3 of the equation added 12 percent to the overall explained variance of PE, which was 30 percent. In addition, the inclusion of OP and ET in step 3 of the equation added a marginal value of 2 percent to the overall explained variance of PP, which was only 7 percent.

These findings again support a direct negative relationship between OP and perceptions of unethical behavior on one hand and voice orientations on the other. The relationship is quite strongly supported for PE but to a much lesser extent for PP. The findings also provide partial support for the mediating effect, for the variable TRS, and to a lesser extent for the variable SWS. These findings also meet the conditions for mediation that require a relationship between the dependent and the independent variables, as well as the mediators and the dependent variables. As can be seen, these relationships also worked in the expected directions for the variable PE, but to a much lesser extent for PP.

Moreover, to fully test the proposed mediating effect, we must return to the conditions for mediation suggested by Baron and Kenny. The fourth condition for mediation suggested by Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998) requires that for full mediation, the effect of the independent variable(s) on the outcome variable(s) controlling for the mediator must be

| 1. Gender | .10 (5.17**) | .01 (.24) | -.06 (--2.90*) | -.10 (--3.66**) |
| 2. Education | .02 (.75) | .01 (.25) | -.05 (--2.49*) | .14 (5.21**) |
| 3. Age | .00 (.12) | -.02 (--1.25) | -.05 (--2.45*) | .12 (4.55**) |
| 4. OP | -.09 (--4.22**) | -.06 (--3.66**) | -.18 (--9.00**) | -.01 (--1.9) |
| 5. ET | .32 (15.15**) | .17 (9.77**) | .40 (20.38**) | .10 (3.66**) |
| 6. SWS | — | .60 (36.28**) | | |

Note: N = 2,281.
*p < .01; **p < .001.
Table 4
Hierarchical Regression Analysis for the Effect of Organizational Politics (OP) and Ethics Perceptions on Political Efficacy (PE) and Political Participation (PP) (standardized coefficients; t-test in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>PE $\beta$ ($t$)</th>
<th>PP $\beta$ ($t$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>Step 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>-.06 (−2.66**)</td>
<td>-.09 (−4.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Education</td>
<td>-.07 (−3.08**)</td>
<td>-.07 (−3.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Age</td>
<td>-.02 (−.68)</td>
<td>-.02 (−1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SWS</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.09 (3.28***)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. TRS</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.35 (13.00***)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. OP</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ET</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PE $R^2$</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$F$ for $\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Education</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Age</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SWS</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>6.28***</td>
<td>216.77***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. TRS</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>91.13***</td>
<td>184.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. OP</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>128.84***</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
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<td>7. ET</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>24.96***</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 2,281$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. 

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Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Analysis for the Effect of Organizational Politics (OP) and Ethics Perceptions on Political Efficacy (PE) and Political Participation (PP) (standardized coefficients; t-test in parentheses)
zero, which was not the case here in any of the equations. For example, the effect of the independent variables on PE controlling for the mediator(s) decreased for ET (from $\beta = .40$ to $\beta = .31$) and for OP (from $\beta = -.18$ to $\beta = -.15$). However, when we controlled for the mediator(s), the effect of the independent variables on PP showed almost no change for either ET or OP. Thus, we concluded that a mediating effect is only partially supported for the variable PE and not supported for the variable PP. In addition, we concluded that TRS is a much better mediator than SWS, which may be considered another antecedent to trust instead of a mediator in this model.

Finally, according to table 4, the control variables had a minor effect on the dependent variables throughout the stages of analysis. Men were consistently more likely than women to be involved in political participation ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .001$). In addition, PP was higher among more educated and older citizens ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = .12$, $p < .001$, respectively). However, whereas men showed higher levels of PE compared with women ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .001$), it was younger citizens and those with lower levels of education who expressed higher levels of PE ($\beta = -.05$, $p < .01$ and $\beta = -.04$, $p < .05$, respectively).

To summarize our results, we suggest figure 3 that indicates the specific significant relationships stemming from the broader theoretical model previously suggested in figure 1, as well as the effect size of the relationships. Cohen (1988, 25) defined the effect size (ES or $d$) as the difference between the means, $M_1 - M_2$, divided by the standard deviation, $\sigma$, of either group. Cohen argued that the standard deviation of either group could be used when the variances of the two groups are close to each other. He further defined effect sizes as “small, $d = .2$,” “medium, $d = .5$,” and “large, $d = .8$.” Following this approach, we calculated the effect size for the significant relationships and found most of them to be medium to high (ranging between $d = .51$ to $d = 1.85$ with the exception of a few, somewhat lower relationships (SES $\rightarrow$ TRS; ET $\rightarrow$ PE; SWS $\rightarrow$ PP). Our findings thus suggest that (1) OP and ET are direct predictors of SWS and TRS; (2) OP is a direct predictor of PE but not of PP; (3) ET is a direct predictor of both PE and PP; (4) SWS mediates the relationship between OP and ET on one hand and PP on the other; (5) TRS mediates the relationship between OP and ET on one hand and PE on the other.
DISCUSSION

Nalbandian (1980) argued that the appropriate place of organizational politics in administration continued to be a topic of importance. Some two decades later, the meaning and nature of organizational politics in the public sector was discussed extensively by Vigoda-Gadot (2003) from an interdisciplinary perspective. Vigoda-Gadot’s study suggested that this arena is rife with internal politics and that its outcomes for various stakeholders can be substantially different from those in the private sector. However, the outcomes of organizational politics in terms of services to the public and the long-range effect they may have on citizens of democratic nations have been overlooked in both the managerial literature and the literature of public policy and administration. The present study deals with perceptions of internal politics in public administration. However, contrary to the common method used in general management theory that focuses on the perspectives of employees and managers, our study focused on the perceptions of citizens as clients. The main rationale for this approach was based on the idea that these views are important for a better understanding of other perceptions and behaviors of citizens toward government and toward the wider political and democratic system. Citizens’ perceptions of internal politics and ethics in the administrative branches of democracies may thus prove useful in explaining trust in governance, as well as voice orientations such as political efficacy and political participation.

The findings of the study support some key relationships in this direction. In accordance with theories suggested in previous studies (Gawthorp 1998; Thompson and Ingraham 1996), we found empirically, using five years’ worth of data, that both organizational politics and ethics are good predictors of citizens’ satisfaction with governmental services and trust in governance. The findings are also in keeping with the general managerial literature that has already firmly established the relationship between organizational politics and fairness, and employees’ satisfaction and loyalty, trust, and commitment to one’s workplace (Bozeman et al. 1996; Cropanzano et al. 1997; Drory 1993). An analysis across years shows that the explained variance due to these direct relationships reached 12–21 percent for satisfaction and 42–58 percent for trust. Obviously, the higher level of explained variance for the variable of trust was due to the contribution of satisfaction, but OP and ethics also played a significant role in this context. The study further reafﬁrms previous knowledge about the way in which satisfaction may lead to trust in governance (Van Ryzin et al. 2004). The direct relationship between OP and ethics and voice orientations is also noteworthy. The importance of citizens’ perceptions of ethics is demonstrated here with the direct relationship between ET and both PE and PP. Contrast this with the finding that citizens’ perceptions of organizational politics accounted for variance only in PE but not in PP. This finding may imply that citizens’ perceptions of organizational politics may have a stronger indirect relationship with voice orientations such as PE and that such relationships should be examined in future studies.

Furthermore, the study established a mediating role of satisfaction and trust in the relationship between the independent variables and voice orientations. While satisfaction is a partial mediator between OP and PE (beyond the direct relationship between OP and PE), it is also a mediator between ET and PP. However, according to the findings, satisfaction is not a mediator between any of the independent variables and PE. Thus, we conclude that the major power of SWS is in contributing to the explanation of political
participation. In contrast with this, the major role of trust in governance is in explaining political efficacy. The revised model presented in figure 3 demonstrates how SWS leads only to PP, whereas TRS leads only to PE. Thus, trust in governance is a good mediator between OP and ET on one hand and political efficacy on the other.

The implications of the findings are also much in line with a study by Rita Mae Kelly (1998), who suggests that for citizens to remain satisfied as customers, they need some broader and comprehensive information assuring that (1) either all were treated equally, or (2) if people were treated differently, they were treated equitably and fairly according to various criteria that are accepted for valid reasons. Such a social equilibrium that is built on fairness, ethics, and a lack of predatory organizational politics is critical for social peace and a democratic society. Ruhil (2000, 834) further argues that “ethics in public administration has a long and checkered past” and that today “we need fewer calls for recognizing the lack of ethical administration and a more practical roadmap to show us how we can get to our destination.” According to this study, an examination over time of the public’s perceptions regarding organizational politics and ethics in public administration is a first step to responding to this challenge.

Despite its contribution, this study still has certain limitations. Although survey data compiled over a five-year period were used here, the study may suffer from common-method and common-source bias. Thus, we recommend that future studies try to compare citizens’ perceptions of organizational politics and ethics with employees’ or with managers’ objective perceptions. By so doing, further consideration may be given to the role of such perceptions and behaviors for organizations in general and especially for the public sector. In addition, it is important to note that no causal relationships should be inferred from our findings. The method used does not allow any time-dependent conclusions, and implications should remain correlative. However, the fact that our findings were quite consistent over the years provides further justification and support for the revised model. This is clearly the advantage of our design, a format that should be encouraged in future studies of behavior in and attitudes toward the public sector. Another limitation of our study concerns the quality of the variables. For example, the acceptable but still somehow low reliability of the variable OP could create noise in the statistical analysis, and future studies will need to use a more solid measure of OP to overcome this problem. Also, data about political participation were collected only for three years rather than the full range of five years. However, this problem should be remedied in coming years as more data about political participation become available through this ongoing survey. In addition, the resulting Cronbach’s alpha for the variable OP was .66, which is somehow lower than the recommended .70 level. While this value is still acceptable, we recommend that future studies try to create an even more reliable and robust scale of OP based on additional relevant items. Finally, this study relied on an Israeli sample, and therefore, its comparison with other samples, for example, from European countries or from North American settings, is limited. Nonetheless, cultural indicators may prove useful in future studies as well. For example, it is possible that organizational politics and ethics are perceived differently in various countries, and thus our findings should be treated with caution (e.g., Romm and Drory 1988; Vigoda 2001).

All in all, the original model and the revised model demonstrate how the relationships between organizational politics, ethics, and the tested variables may be interwoven. They illustrate the linkage between bureaucracy and democracy based on citizens’ best judgments of the processes in public administration that should be ethical, fair, professional,
and equitable but at the same time effective, efficient, and smoothly functioning. Our use of citizens’ perspectives for measuring OP and ethics in the public sector is not very common. However, it is based on the idea that the public is aware of internal power struggles and self-seeking activities that sharply conflict with professional and ethical processes in public agencies. Our research joins other studies in public opinion research that give a great deal of consideration to the people’s voice in studying the relationships and conflict between democracy and bureaucracy. According to Thompson (1983), Stivers (2001), and Gawthrop (1996), this conflict is inherent to our lives in free societies. It reflects the essence of the contradiction between the politics of the democratic ethos and the professionalism of bureaucracy in modern nations. The five-year study reveals some core relationships in this direction that can be used in future research. The findings help us in our search to create a more functional bureaucracy in a democratic ethos and to safeguard democracy under the constraints of bureaucracy. The article also has an interdisciplinary orientation, as it tried to show how a theory from one arena (management and organizational behavior) could be used effectively in another arena (public administration and political science). This approach may promote new ideas about how to improve the management of public sector agencies. Another major contribution of this study is its exploration of an alternative viewpoint regarding the study of organizational politics and ethics. The study demonstrated that a variety of perspectives need to be considered when examining the impact of power struggles, influence tactics, and politics in the workplace. While the views of the employees are critical, the perceptions of the public should also be investigated, as they are a powerful tool in helping us understand this phenomenon and its consequences.

REFERENCES


